

WORKFORCE OBSERVATIONS FOR NORTHWEST WISCONSIN COUNTIES

APRIL 2003



State of Wisconsin
Department of Workforce Development

Unemployment rates decline in some Northwest counties

A small increase in unemployment in Northwest Wisconsin in March produced a slightly higher unemployment rate than in the previous month but one that was nearly a full percentage point less than one year ago. The March unemployment rate in Northwest Wisconsin was 8.8 percent compared with 8.7 percent in February and 9.7 percent a year ago.

In Wisconsin the March unemployment rate, seasonally adjusted, declined to 5.3 percent from 5.5 percent. Not seasonally adjusted the Wisconsin unemployment rate was unchanged at 6.5 percent.

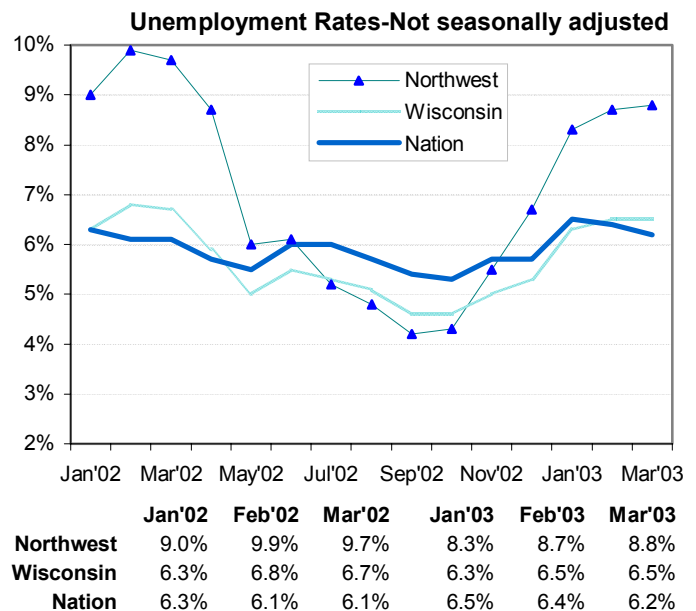
Fifty-one of the state's 72 counties had unemployment rates higher than 6.5 percent including all ten of the Northwest Wisconsin counties. The lowest unemployment rate in the region, 6.9 percent in Douglas County, was 47th highest in the state. The highest unemployment rate in the region and fourth highest in the state was 11.1 percent in Rusk County.

The unemployment rate in Rusk County, however, had the second largest over-the-year reduction in the state. One year ago the unemployment rate in Rusk County was 12.8 percent, 1.7 percentage points higher than the current estimate. The greatest reduction in unemployment rate in the state of 1.9 percentage points occurred in Ashland County. The unemployment rate in Ashland County, however, of 10.4 percent was the ninth highest in the state. Burnett County had the third greatest reduction of 1.6 percentage points to the current estimate of 7.3 percent.

As spring approaches the number of participants in the labor force begins to rise as more jobs are available. In March the labor force in Northwest Wisconsin increased by 350 participants to 96,200. Some of those entering the

labor force found jobs while others did not. The number of unemployed in the area increased by 200 and bumped the unemployment rate up to 8.8 percent.

In late March and early April the number of residents filing claims for unemployment compensation benefits has declined, but in mid-March it was the highest since the first week in January. In the week ending March 16, the week used to estimate the number of unemployed in the labor force, nearly 5,470 residents filed a claim to receive unemployment benefits. Even though this was the highest count since January it was 130 less than in the same week one year earlier. By mid-April the number of claimants declined to under 5,000 and the number filing initial claims



Civilian Labor Force Estimates for Northwest Wisconsin counties: Current month - March, 2003

	Ashland			Bayfield			Burnett			Douglas			Iron		
	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02
Civilian labor force	8,659	8,586	8,328	7,833	7,812	7,452	8,107	7,950	7,587	23,521	23,739	23,202	3,440	3,490	3,386
Employed	7,755	7,740	7,303	7,091	7,076	6,678	7,512	7,361	6,911	21,903	22,103	21,276	3,077	3,131	3,027
Unemployed	904	846	1,025	742	736	774	595	589	676	1,618	1,636	1,926	363	359	359
% unemployed	10.4	9.9	12.3	9.5	9.4	10.4	7.3	7.4	8.9	6.9	6.9	8.3	10.6	10.3	10.6

	Price			Rusk			Sawyer			Taylor			Washburn		
	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02
Civilian labor force	7,538	7,457	7,133	7,529	7,391	7,310	10,149	10,080	10,214	11,208	11,117	10,670	8,199	8,190	7,949
Employed	6,939	6,887	6,521	6,693	6,564	6,374	9,210	9,171	9,310	10,093	10,105	9,658	7,419	7,374	7,107
Unemployed	599	570	612	836	827	936	939	909	904	1,115	1,012	1,012	780	816	842
% unemployed	7.9	7.6	8.6	11.1	11.2	12.8	9.3	9.0	8.9	9.9	9.1	9.5	9.5	10.0	10.6

* not seasonally adjusted

Industry Employment Estimates: Current month - March 2003

(Employment in thousands)	Ashland			Bayfield			Burnett			Douglas			Iron		
	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02
Total Nonfarm	8.7	8.7	8.6	3.8	3.8	3.5	5.0	4.9	4.7	18.2	18.0	17.5	2.3	2.3	2.3
Const/Min'g/Nat. Resources	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.8	0.7	0.7	0.2	0.2	0.2
Manufacturing	1.1	1.1	1.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.3	1.3	1.3	0.4	0.4	0.4
Trade	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.6	0.6	0.6	3.1	3.1	3.1	0.3	0.4	0.4
Transportation & Utilities	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	2.0	2.0	1.7	0.1	0.1	0.0
Financial Activities	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.1	0.1	0.1
Education & Health Services	1.9	1.9	1.8	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.6	0.6	0.6	1.7	1.7	1.9	0.3	0.3	0.3
Leisure & Hospitality	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.0	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.5	2.2	2.2	2.1	0.4	0.4	0.4
Info, Prof/Bus.Srv, Othr Srv.	0.5	0.5	0.7	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	3.3	3.2	2.9	0.1	0.1	0.1
Total Government	2.2	2.2	2.0	1.4	1.4	1.3	1.5	1.5	1.4	3.3	3.3	3.2	0.3	0.3	0.4

	Price			Rusk			Sawyer			Taylor			Washburn		
	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02	Mar '03	Feb '03	Mar '02
Total Nonfarm	6.7	6.6	6.4	5.9	5.8	5.8	6.5	6.4	6.7	8.8	8.9	8.6	5.8	5.7	5.7
Const/Min'g/Nat. Resources	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.2
Manufacturing	2.6	2.5	2.4	2.0	2.0	2.0	0.5	0.5	0.5	2.7	2.8	2.8	1.1	1.0	1.0
Trade	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.6	1.2	1.1	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.3	0.8	0.8	0.8
Transportation & Utilities	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.2	0.2	0.2
Financial Activities	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2
Education & Health Services	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.7	0.7	0.7	1.1	1.1	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.8
Leisure & Hospitality	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.9	0.9	0.7	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.5
Info, Prof/Bus.Srv, Othr Srv.	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.7	1.1	1.1	0.9	0.4	0.4	0.4
Total Government	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.3	1.3	1.4	1.9	1.9	2.0	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.4	1.4	1.5

Current month preliminary. Estimates based on March 2002 benchmark. Summing from unrounded numbers.

for benefits dropped to under 500. Roughly one-third of the initial claims for benefits were from first-time filers while the rest were from claimants extending or resuming a previous claim. Nearly half of the initial claims are from workers laid off by area manufacturing firms.

While the loss of manufacturing jobs is still apparent in most northwest counties, a few counties are beginning to see some gains or at least the stop of further erosion. In Price County the number of manufacturing jobs rose in March and is now 200 higher than one year ago. Production jobs also increased from February in Rusk and Washburn counties.

The increase in construction jobs out-numbered the gains in production jobs. Both increases reflect some of the seasonal hiring that is beginning to occur by local employers. It is still early for most construction projects, and area road limits are still in effect, but crews have begun to prepare sites for future construction, marking right-of-ways and utility lines. By next month those crews will get larger and construction season will begin.

During this economic downturn the demand for lumber and wood products from building construction has remained relatively good in response to a strong demand for housing. In spite of that, local wood products manufacturers did layoff workers this winter, a standard seasonal oc-

currence that was suspended in the boom of the late 1990s. Many of these workers should return to work next month.

March employment in leisure and hospitality did not change from February when many local employers had to lay off workers because of the lack of snow. Not only did workers lose their jobs because of the lack of snow but many of these employers are struggling financially because of it. Businesses may still qualify for financial assistance through the snow-emergency loan program for small tourism businesses north of highway 29. Applications are due by May 15, 2003. Qualifying businesses can apply for a low interest loan (2%) of up to \$20,000 to cover existing debt service payments for a 12-month period. More information is available at the Dept. of Commerce, Tourism site: <http://www.commerce.state.wi.us/ed/ED-TDI.html>

Overall, there were 500 more jobs with local employers in March than in February and nearly 2,000 more than one year ago. In addition to the increase in jobs in construction, trade employers and information, professional and business services each added 100 workers in March.

Government agencies also added 50 jobs in March. These are seasonal additions and reflect renewed activity in road maintenance and preparation for the reopening of state and local parks.

Look for the most current Labor Market Information at: WWW.DWD.STATE.WI.US/LMI

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